



RIGHTSIZING: WHAT MAKES IT SO HARD?

PART 2 OF A 2 PART SERIES



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To paraphrase Murphy's much-quoted "law" – "When one thing goes wrong, everything seems to go wrong". Or the sum may contribute to the overall outcome. The process of moving and rightsizing can be easily configured into this general model: several components have impact on the singular issue-moving.

And in the process of moving, the degree of emotional upheaval felt by the individuals during this process can be placed on a continuum and in fact is currently a hot topic ("hoarder disorder") in the country, being discussed and studied within psychological circles and clinical practices, research, and numerous articles. It is the subject of an A & E Television series and a new book written by Michael A. Tompkins, Ph.D. and Tamara L. Hartl, Ph. D. entitled "Digging Out: Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding, and Compulsive Acquiring"

When confronted with "letting go" in combination with the stressful process of moving and multiple decision-making tasks at once, the emotional overload can be paralyzing for many people. The process is fraught with stress and anxiety-producing decisions.

And stress, let alone multiple stressors, have great impact on our ability to think and act. Just at a time when complete clarity is needed in making many long-term decisions, signing contracts and agreements, etc., additional stress exacerbates things so that memory, clarity, focus and attention become clouded, thus impeding optimum attention to details inherent in many of these decisions.

Added to this are a number of fears that people have and may not be sharing with loved ones: Will I make new friends? Will I be happy? Is this a mistake? Reminiscing during the process of rightsizing, packing and "closing out" much of the past, brings you back in time to more secure moments. Those feelings of security, attachment and well-being seem at odds with the often disjointed aspects of choosing what to keep and what to donate, discard, gift or store. It may seem that the person is losing control over their cherished possessions. The disharmony between feelings and reality just add to the major transition taking place.

The book, "Digging Out Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding & Compulsive Acquiring"

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offers important advice on how to keep loved ones who hoard safe and how to preserve your relationship with them. Ways to identify the behavioral condition and deal with it are comprehensively discussed. The book, just released last month, has been described as "an essential guide...offering practical tools that really work to reduce harm associated with clutter and improve family relationships."

Author, Dr. Michael Tompkins, regarded nationally as an expert on this subject, and a founding partner of the San Francisco Bay Area Center for Cognitive Therapy describes in his book, the foremost tool a partner needs in encouraging their partner to gain control of their hoarding problem is to "LEAP": L(listen) E (empathize) A (agree) P (partner). "We recommend using L.E.A.P" (originally devised by Xavier Amador to engage and reengage your loved one in the harm reduction approach." The term reengage is used because the authors point out that "helping your loved one accept help is an ongoing process".

Another phase of self-help provided in this book is conducting the home assessment, "a vital tool in auditing the negative behavior in order to stimulate positive action. A family member or close friend can work with the individual who has the condition. The home assessment should take one to two hours." It is recommended that only one family member (or team member) conduct this assessment. The process ranges from difficult to painful for the afflicted person and those helping him/her should be gentle in this activity.

"Most people who hoard tend to resist or avoid treatment or help", and Dr. Tompkins adds "they appear baffled by people's reactions and are oblivious to the risks and discomfort from living with too many things." However, the following steps are the suggested guidelines to follow in pursuing positive behavioral changes to live more comfortably with someone with the hoarding problem:

- Show respect (watch reactions and remain as neutral as possible)
- Be prepared (something as simple as using a kitchen sink to get a glass of water or using a malfunctioning toilet in a filthy bathroom could be challenging). Excess paper clutter could pose a fire hazard, as well.
- Explain the goal of the assessment (you are basically watching for harm reduction mechanisms and identifying those as targets)
- Photograph potential harm reduction targets
- L.E.A.P. to answer questions (answer questions posed by your loved one directly and truthfully)

- Complete (or work with) a questionnaire provided in the book.
- Leave time to chat. This is an opportunity to glide into general conversation and alleviate tension.

Margit Novack, Senior Moving Specialist and Founder and President of Moving Solutions, a Philadelphia-based move management company, has had experience with hoarding situations through Moving Solutions. She has had to, literally, weed through homes characterized by hoarding behavior and previously described. As pointed out, this overabundance of things, in disrepair, rusted, broken and alarmingly dangerous, not only impact functioning, but create hazards in a home, putting family members at risk. She has had to intervene in order to accomplish her contractual goals for clients. She notes that, "for hoarders and their families, it can feel as if things have replaced people."

But, on the positive side, Margit says, "I tell people moving is a lot like childbirth in that if we didn't forget over time how hard it was, we would never do it again. Like other parents, I adore my children, and time does in fact erase the pain of the event. Once childbirth is over, the pain ends and then, joyously, a whole new life begins. Many things are tough and painful while you are going through it but then afterward you know how worthwhile it was. Moving is a new beginning and, for most people, presents new opportunities for living a better life."

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN LETTING GO:

What items will you need to discard, donate, sell, store or gift in order to hold onto a possession from your past (or family's past) after you move?

How frequently are you going to use it?

How frequently have you looked at it? How often have you referred to specific mementos in context of family heirlooms, history or lore?

How often have other members of the family requested to see it, use it or show it to others?

How prominent is it in your life today?

Is it prominently displayed in public areas of your home?

How much available storage space do you have in your new home/living space and how much are you bringing?

Where will these "collectibles" end up? Who else besides me wants to continue to store/display/hold on to these (i.e. photo albums, mementos from past generations, graduation mementos, items of apparel, art/crafts, dishware, etc.)